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Medical team befriends Belize

Amigo Internacionales brings care and hope to tiny, isolated nation

CRIQUE SARCO, Belize (UPI) — Every year volunteer medical teams from Amigos Internacionales travel from the United States to tiny, impoverished Belize where the care available is sporadic and the suffering chronic.

Dr. David Nichols, a dentist from Tyler, has had his share of frustrations during trips to the multiracial Central American democracy.

"You're not going down there to cure all the deformities in the country," he said. "You're going to get the pus out of their mouths."

Shipwrecked British seamen founded Belize by accident in 1638, and the nation's progress from British colony to protectorate to independence has been marked by that same ad-hoc, seat-of-the-pants quality.

Formerly British Honduras, Belize is against the Caribbean between Guatemala and the Mexican state of Quintana Roo. It never was the most remote nation in Central America, only the most inaccessible, thanks to a treacherous 190-mile offshore reef.

Until air travel, it was so tough getting to Belize that Aldous Huxley was moved to remark in 1934, "If the world had any ends, British Honduras would surely be one of them."

The nation scatters its population of 160,000 over a jungle about the size of New Hampshire, some 8,867 square miles. One-third of the people cluster in Belize City, the nation's largest town and leading port, a metropolis with no traffic lights and a sewer system dependent on catfish.

The pathway that reaches from Texas to Belize is paved by philanthropy.

"In 1962 a group of men in Athens, Texas, formed an interdenominational philanthropic organization — Amigos Internationales," said Dr. Kerfoot Walker, director of the Tyler-Smith County Health Department, which coordinates the expeditions. "They wanted to put their energies and money together to reach out to people in ways other than those practiced by their individual churches.

"In early 1970, we struck an agreement with the government of Belize, promising them regular — but intermittent — dental and medical service."

Because medical supplies are hard to come by in Belize, the Amigos take along everything they can cajole from U.S. drug companies.

"Once when I went there the district hospital at Punta Gorda had only eight antibiotic tablets left," Walker said.

As Nichols put it, "Going on one of these medical missions is kind of like going to war."

Amigos sent 12 medics to Belize this year: Dr. George Skipworth of Columbus, Ga.; Nichols Dr. Tom Cooper; Dr. Jim Holton; Dr. Ernest Brady; Dr. Andrew Quiroz; surgical nurse Loraine Jewett; nurse anesthetist Bill O'Neal; and medical assistants Debbie Morris and Carolyn Jones, all of Tyler; Dr. Mike Kennebrew of New Orleans; and medical assistant Cheryl Chapman of Dallas, who also is a UPI reporter.

The group split with Skipworth, Brady, Nichols, Morris, Jones and Chapman continuing to the jungle and Holton, Kennebrew, Quiroz, Cooper, O'Neal and Jewett staying at the hospital in Belize City.

The trip by dugout from Punta Gorda to the interior Mayan jungle village of Crique Sarco took five hours, a long time to sit motionless on a narrow wooden boat seat.

"Toledo District sometimes is called the forgotten district," said nurse Dorothy Wingard, a Mennonite health-care worker in Crique Sarco. "It's the farthest from the seat of government and perhaps the most isolated."

The medics began work immediately as twilight fell.

Wingard accompanied Skipworth, Brady and Nichols to the thatched hut of the Choc family. Candalaria Choc was having problems in the final week of her pregnancy, but she refused to leave her husband and eight children to seek care.

Choc's husband, stricken with malaria, lay passively in his hammock. The dusty room stank of fever, and chickens trailed in and out through the door.

"If she doesn't want to go to hospital, nurse, I won't make her," the husband said. "If God wants her, she die. If he doesn't, she won't."

Some stories, like that of Stephanie Johnson, 3, a cripple, had happier endings.

Stephanie, daughter of village schoolteacher Gene-

Please turn to AMIGOS/A26

UPI/REUTERS

WAITING FOR THE DOCTOR: Indians in the village of Laguna relax as they await their turn with Dr. George Skipworth, right, a member of Amigos Internacionales.

TALK OF TEXAS

All in courtroom were held as POWs

By JACK MAGUIRE

A San Antonio trial once ended without a decision being rendered because the entire court was taken prisoner by an invading army!

The case involved some prominent Texans. Dr. Shields Booker, a physician, was suing the city of San Antonio for a 50 peso fee that he insisted was owed him by Mayor Juan Seguin. His attorney was Samuel A. Maverick, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

District Judge Anderson Hutchinson convened the fall term of court on Sept. 2, 1842. On the next Friday he was hearing the case against Seguin when he recessed court for the weekend.

Just before dawn on Sunday, Sept. 11, Gen.Adrian Woll and his Mexican Army invaded San Antonio. Although Texas had been a republic for six years, Woll hoped to regain it for Mexico. Lawyer Maverick and some others fired on the invaders but soon were surrounded and forced to surrender.

Woll not only took Maverick as prisoner but added Judge Hutchinson, Dr. Booker, the other attorneys and citizens who had been attending the trial as his captives. He marched them to Peyote Prison in Mexico and jailed them.

Woll's action created an international incident. Eventually the United States intervened on behalf of the Republic of Texas. In 1843, President John Tyler negotiated the release of the Texans. However, Dr. Booker had been accidentally killed while in jail so the trial was never resumed.

In Albany, Shackelford County, the former jail is known as "The Alphabet House."

When it was built in 1879, various contractors furnished the native stone. To make it easy for the county to pay them for the limestone, each carved an initial into the stones they furnished. Today most of the letters of the alphabet still are visible.

Movies and television sagas to the contrary, early day ranchers didn't drive their herds up the trail through acres of tumbleweeds.

Those "tumbling tumbleweeds," romanticized in a hit ballad sung by Texan Gene Autry in the 1930s, didn't appear in the United States until 1874. By then, most of the trail drives had ended.

The tumbleweed is a Russian immigrant. Its seeds infested flax imported by South Dakota settlers who had come to the United States from the Ukraine. Within 20 years after it arrived here, its spiny carcasses were rolling across the flatlands of at least 16 states.

The vagabond plant resists all efforts to control it.

Years ago, a budding publisher arrived in Schulenberg, Fayette County, where several others had tried to establish a newspaper without success.

"I'm going to start a newspaper that will stick," he vowed.

He did, and it has. The Schulenberg Sticker still is being published.

Peter H. Bell is the only former Texas Ranger to govern the state. He was elected as the third chief executive in 1849.

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Author buried in research for second volume on LBJ

Dallas Times Herald

DALLAS (AP) — The letters and the telephone calls come regularly to Robert A. Caro's apartment in New York.

Come and see me, Lyndon Johnson once sicced the feds on me. Or, I don't know if this will help you, but Lyndon was so much a campaigner that he once shook my hands three different times at a reception, forgetting each previous greeting. Or, I have some information for you about Lyndon Johnson, please contact me.

"It's been three years since the book came out but I still get messages like these all the time," says Caro in an interview with the Dallas Times Herald, as he thumbs through the day's mail. "It's really pleasing that people remember me and try to help."

The book, of course, is "The Path to Power," Caro's monumental biography of Johnson's life from his birth in 1908 to his unsuccessful run for the U.S. Senate in 1941.

Published in November 1982, the 670,000-word account created a sensation with a plethora of startling revelations strewn about a generally dark portrait of the Texan who would become the country's 36th president.

Despite some criticism from Johnson associates and a handful of reviewers, it was voted best non-fiction book of the year by the National Book Critics Circle, which now consists of the country's top 200 book reviewers.

Now Caro, a former journalist, is hard at work on Volume 2, which will follow Johnson's life from 1941 through his years in the U.S. Senate (he was elected in 1948) and as vice president.

The book will end Nov. 22, 1963, the day that LBJ was sworn in as president at Love Field in Dallas following John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Volume 3 will cover Johnson's presidency and his years in retirement until his death in 1973.

As exacting as Caro is in his research, he is notoriously bad at estimating his own deadlines.

He thought his biography of New York City public works czar Robert Moses, "The Power Broker," could be done in nine months.

It took seven years, although it won a Pulitzer Prize

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"THE PATH TO POWER": Author Robert Caro is working on part two of his biography of Lyndon Baines Johnson, shown in 1966 photo.

Opera troupe operates on wheels

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ROAD SHOWS: Members of the Texas Opera Theater rehearse a scene from "Carmen," which the traveling opera will perform.

HOUSTON (AP) — For the Texas Opera Theater, opening night can be on a street corner in Arkansas, a shopping mall in Massachusetts or even a prison in Louisiana.

The 60-member troupe willingly spends weeks on a bus, putting up with some tough times, to take the music of Donzetti, Puccini and Verdi to small town America, from Show Low, Ariz., to Orono, Maine.

"There isn't any place we won't go," said Jane Weaver, general manager and chief executive officer of Texas Opera Theater. "All we need is a space about 20 feet by 30 feet."

In Eagle Pass, a town of 21,000 along the Texas-Mexico border, the 550-seat junior high school gymnasium is the nearest thing to a theater.

When the opera is in town, high school girls in prom dresses and corsages hand out programs to patrons who watch the show from bleachers.

"That's all we have," says Caroline Cerna, an Eagle Pass woman who has worked to bring Texas Opera Theater to the community for nine years. "But it's important that the people in our town, especially the children, hear good music."

Texas Opera Theater was organized in 1974 with a grant from the Galveston-based Moody Foundation. The group at first served as the educational arm of the Houston Grand Opera, primarily touring schools in the Houston area.

In 1980, it spun off as a separate artistic entity dedicated to nurturing the careers of young American singers and to showing new audiences that opera is anything but stuffy or boring.

> *In one community, you could tell the women were dragging their husbands to the performance. They still had the dirt in their boots.*
>
> —JANE WEAVER
> Opera general manager

Since then, the troupe of 20 singers, a 23-piece orchestra and a production crew of five has visited 40 states and introduced the classics — all sung in English — to more than 1 million people.

"In one community, you could tell the women were dragging their husbands to the performance. They still had the dirt in their boots," Weaver said. "But after a while they really got into it. They didn't exactly know when to clap so they stomped their feet. And that's OK. It's whatever they want it to be."

The company left recently on its winter tour, an itinerary traveling 3,050 miles to perform Bizet's "Carmen" — the story of a flirtatious Gypsy girl and the soldier who forsakes everything for her love — in 19 cities in Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma.

The show is compact, with the sets, costumes and lights easily moved from town to town in a truck.

Some opera scripts have been trimmed. Missing are the population scenes, opening chorus and heavy orchestration.

But all the essential elements are there.

"Learning to like opera isn't like turning on the radio and listening to Elton John," says Weaver, a former production manager with the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., who admits she was not an opera fan at one time.

Accommodations for the performers are a long way from the luxury of the Met.

But the singers, who stay with the company two or three years, don't seem to mind.

"They go out on stage every night, in costume, with a role, and perform for audiences that absolutely love them and embrace them and don't judge them quite so hard," Weaver says. "There aren't a lot of opportunities to do that in America."

And everybody gets a chance.

One night a singer may have the lead role, then play a supporting part the next performance. And it takes a lot of endurance, says mezzo-soprano Karen Nickell.

"It's kind of like the Olympics," says Nickell, 32, of Salina, Kan. "You spend the day riding the bus. When you get to the town, you have to put on your makeup, get dressed and then do the show. After a few hours' sleep, you do it all over again."

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